

# "Am Now Red Cuba's Most Wanted Man... Will Fight On..."

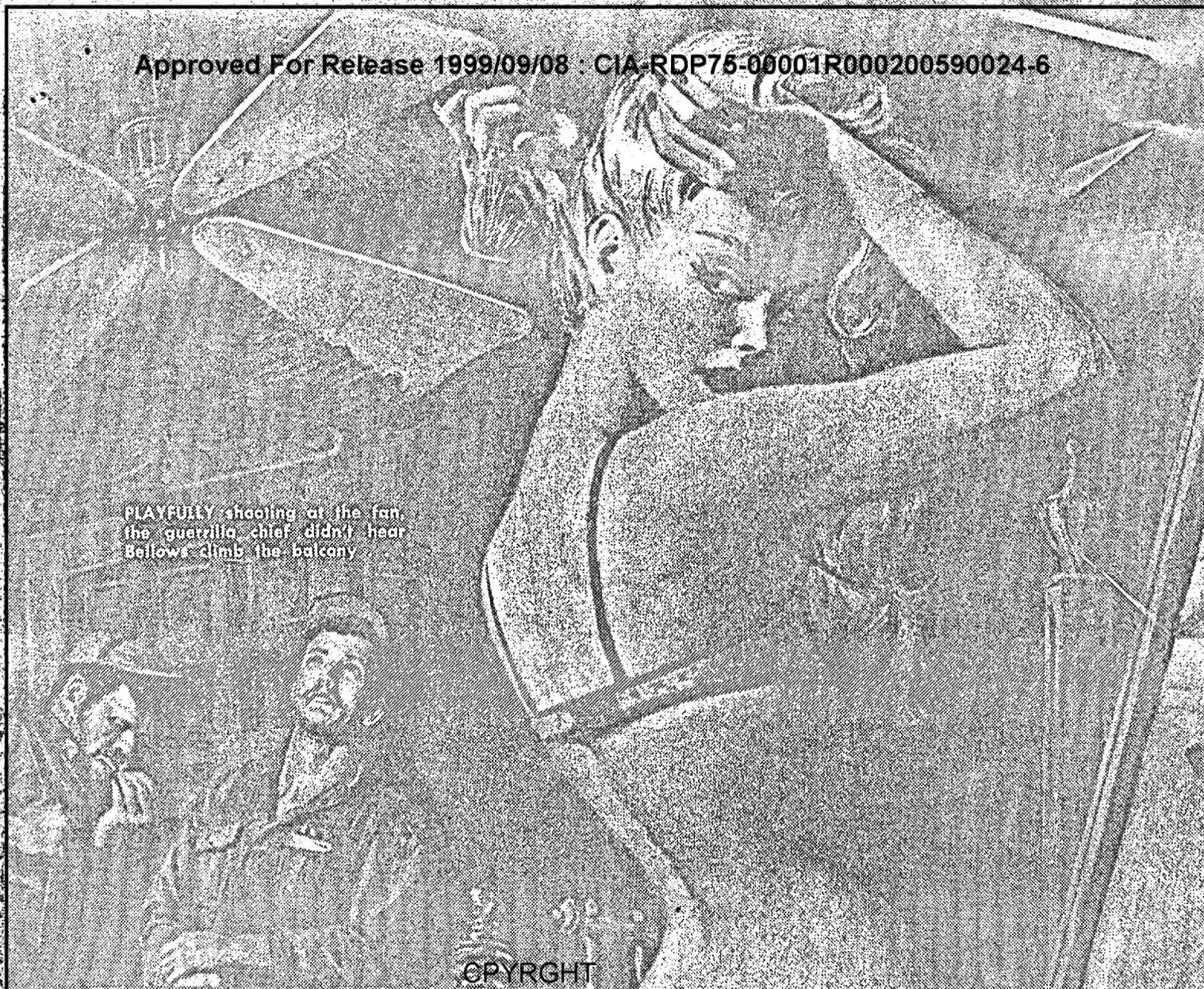
## A U.S. AGENT'S VITAL MISSION

By NEIL TURNBULL



A super-secret Red subversion corps, it had reached its bloody fingers into every South American country, building up a hurricane of sabotage and murder that threatened to topple a dozen governments like dominoes. Then a jaguar-savage Yank renegade used this vicious Communist army back into the Caribbean...





PLAYFULLY shooting at the fan,  
the guerrilla chief didn't hear  
Bellows' climb the balcony

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## TRUE BOOKLENGTH ADVENTURE

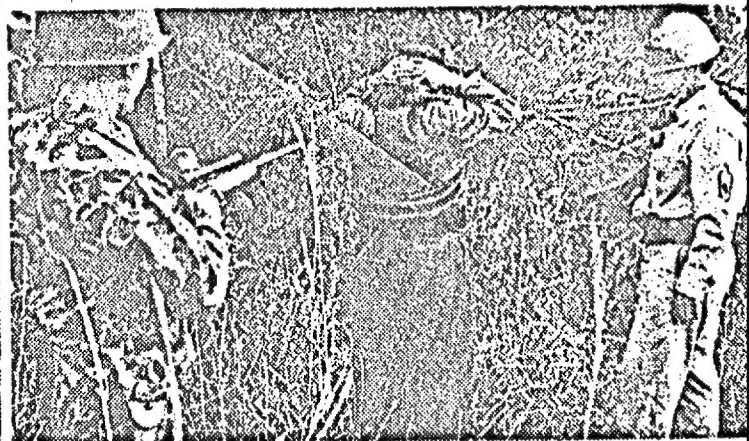
CARACAS:

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"THAT'S the lot," Walt Bellows told the skinny, stoop-shouldered little Latin-American in the camouflage fatigues. "Now if you'll give me a receipt I'll be on my way."

It was the night of July 6, 1961 and Bellows—an employee of *Bontemps et Fils*, the Caribbean's oldest and most reputable gun running firm—had just delivered a consignment of arms to a Communist guerrilla force operating in Northwestern Venezuela. The transaction had been made in one of the countless, shadowed coastal inlets north of Lake Maracaibo. It had taken the silent terrorists less than five minutes to move dozens of crates from the deck of Bellows' 30 foot cabin cruiser to the backs of waiting burros.





AFTER escape from Venezuelan guerrillas (below) holding him captive, Bellows led CIA-supported force against them . . .



NATIVES who opposed Red group were executed without trial

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For the first time since Bellows had put in to shore, the little leader of the party spoke: "You are a *Yanqui*, no?" "Yes," Bellows grunted. "Now how about that receipt?" The man's coffee-black eyes hardened with suspicion and he caressed the stock of his carbine. "I was not expecting a *Yanqui*. Why would a *Yanqui* be working for a Haitian like Oliver Bontemps?"

"Because he pays better than anybody else . . . Now let's get this show over with. These are dangerous waters."

Bellows was a tall, rangy, sandy haired man with the kind of rugged, stiff muscled features that

make the concealment of emotion easy. But he had trouble suppressing outward signs of nervousness as he picked out the score of dark figures half visible amid the heavy undergrowth all around him. He had been supplying arms to Central and South American revolutionary groups for nearly seven years. This was the first time the customers had greeted him with outright hostility.

**C**OULD this nameless runt have guessed the truth? he wondered, an icy first seeming to close over his intestines. Could he know that Bellows was actually in the pay of the CIA, that he was using this gun running operation as a cover for tracking down the leaders of the Castro-inspired Venezuelan guerrilla movement?

It's impossible, he told himself. No one could catch wise, not even Oliver Bontemps himself . . .

Then the little man reached into the breast pocket of his shirt and pulled out a piece of paper and a pencil. He laid the paper across the back of

one of his men and laboriously scrawled a signature, passed it to Bellows.

"Thanks," the American muttered and started toward his cruiser, the *Felicite*.

He had taken fewer than a dozen steps when the distant, pulsing roar of powerful marine engines knifed through the dark jungle backwater. Bellows froze in his tracks. Behind him, the guerrilla leader was barking orders in rapid Spanish, telling his followers to move the burros out *my rapido*. A dozen rifle bolts clicked shells into place.

## RED COBA'S MOST WANTED MAN



SABOTEURS in hand crushed by Bellows were so shaken they could assemble the bombs by touch alone

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LEADERS of Lake Maracaibo Red army—including female "support troops" (above)—were trained at Cuba's La Cabana fortress

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Bellows threw himself on the ground, groping for the butt of the holstered .45 automatic on his hip as he crawled into a heavy clump of marsh grass. The guerrilla chieftain took shelter beside him. They could already see the long, sleek form of the Venezuelan patrol boat moving down the middle of the channel, its searchlights probing both shores. A lookout's hoarse cry told him that the *Felicite* had been spotted.

The patrol boat veered toward the smaller, unoccupied vessel, its forward deck gun booming, heavy machine guns



**EX-GUNRUNNER** Walt Bellows (left) now owns a travel agency in Detroit, Mich. "I always feel funny recommending a 'restful Caribbean tour' " he said recently, "since I'm still high on Castro's revenge list. Even opening a can of supermarket tamales, I half expect a bomb to go off in my face"

banging away from amidships. When dealing with suspected gun runners, the crews never took chances. In seconds the *Felicite* was a blazing pyre, settling into the channel mud like a dying rhino. In the trees all around them, parrots and macaws, roused from sleep by the noise and the sudden wash of blistering light, set up a squawking, indignant chorus. With the boat knocked out, the gunners turned their fire on the shore, emptying belt after belt into the shadowed jungle. Bellows crammed his face into the dirt as slugs whistled over his head like angry, buzzing insects.

"They will not come ashore," the guerrilla chieftain whispered. "Not at night. They never do . . ."

His prediction turned out to be correct. After a quick search of the *Felicite's* charred hulk, the boat's crewmen clambered back aboard their own craft; it swung about toward the Gulf of Venezuela, half a mile away. Soon the only sound disturbing the air was the scream of parrots.

The guerrilla stood up and fastened a half-amused stare on Bellows' sweating face. "It seems you will be with us longer than you thought, *Yanqui*. Unless you plan to swim back to Haiti . . ."

**WALTER** Byron Bellows was not, by nature, a likely recruit for a career in espionage. At the time of the events described above, he was 32 years old—a cynical, rather cheerfully amoral man who, before obtaining his position with Oliver Bontemps, had worked at such disparate trades as smuggling, forging pre-Columbian sculpturing, and operating a charter fishing boat. Born in Detroit,

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# "AM NOW RED CUBA'S MOST WANTED MAN..."

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Michigan, he had lived in various Caribbean countries since his teens. His father had been a notably unsuccessful planter who had run through a string of Central American enterprises.

However, despite his shiftless ways, Walt Bellows had one quality that made him invaluable to the CIA—he hated Communism with a bitter vengeance. His feeling stemmed from the Korean War, when he had been a PFC in an infantry company captured by the Chinese Reds during the Allied retreat from the Yalu River. He spent the rest of the war in a POW camp near Pyongyang.

"All my life personal freedom had been as important to me as breathing," he declared last year to Jasper Ludden, author of the best selling study of Castroism *Red Earth of Cuba* (Haverford and Bates, New York, 1963). "Even being made to wear a necktie at a party seemed an infringement on my rights. Two years of freezing my tail in a barbed wire compound, eating maggotsy rice and fighting those crazy Chinese brainwashing schemes really got in my craw."

Repatriated in 1954 and discharged from the army three months later, Bellows dropped his two years of accumulated back pay in a crap game aboard the troop ship returning him to the States. He had to borrow the fare to reach Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where he had left his small fishing boat in drydock after he received his draft notice in 1950. As he'd expected, the boat had been sold for non-payment of storage fees years earlier.

**D**EAD broke, Bellows accepted a dangerous but high paying job with Oliver Bontemps, an acquaintance of his late father. Bontemps, known as the King of the Gun Runners, was one of the Caribbean's legendary figures. For nearly three decades he had run the firm of *Bontemps et Fils*, supplying weapons to revolutionary movements throughout Latin America. The various dictators who'd ruled Haiti during Bontemps' career had let him operate for two sensible reasons: 1.) Except for a U.S.-based fruit company, he was the single largest dispenser of bribes to government officials; 2.) Not even under the most tempting of circumstances had he dealt with enemies of any current Haitian regime.

Bellows would never forget his initiation into the organization. The first step was a battery of psychological tests, an idea Bontemps had imported from the States. Two days after taking the exams he was summoned to the sprawling Bontemps villa in Petionville, a posh suburb on a mountainside overlooking Port-au-Prince.

Oliver Bontemps received Bellows in his mahogany-paneled office. He was a broad shouldered, blunt featured, superlatively ugly man with skin the color of ripe eggplant. Only the gray-white of his close cropped hair hinted that he was more than seventy years old. Above his desk was a sampler, hand embroidered by Madame Bontemps. On it was stitched the world-famous motto of the firm: "IN WAR OR REVOLUTION, THE SIDE THAT PAYS CASH IS ALWAYS RIGHT."

After Bellows entered, Bontemps kept him standing for minutes while he studied the American's test results. "According to this," Bontemps murmured, "You are given to reckless and undisciplined behavior, are often motivated by blind greed and exhibit a nearly pathological distrust of organized human society." Then he stood up, smiled broadly and extended his hand across the desk. "Congratulations, M'sieu Bellows. You are the kind of man Bontemps et Fils needs!"

For the next six years, Walt Bellows was one of the more than 50 small boat operators who flew the Bontemps Company's personal flag—a pound sterling sign mounted on a field of clover green. His profitable new career wasn't as dangerous as he'd expected. Bontemps had contacts in every Latin American government, a systematic network of bribed officials that enabled his "fleet" to operate almost with impunity. Except for a few run-ins with hi-jackers, Bellows rarely heard a shot fired.

Disillusion began to set in during the late fifties, when he made several runs to Cuba, delivering guns to Castro's rebels. Although the movement's Communist leanings were not yet known, Bellows immediately sensed that he was dealing with a new, dangerous brand of revolutionary. "The bastards simply weren't corrupt enough," he told Jasper Ludden. "Oliver Bontemps used to say that

political idealists were the worst swine on earth, not to be trusted under any circumstances. I think he had a point . . . Anyway, after Batista was booted out and Fidel showed his true colors, I began to get kind of nervous. In '60 and '61, the Russians hadn't started pouring cheap munitions into Cuba yet, so Castro was still forced to use commercial outfits like Oliver's to supply his 'liberation armies'. Helping one gang of crooks throw out another gang of crooks never bothered me but running hardware to Red forces in half a dozen countries was something else again. I was on the verge of quitting when the CIA tapped me . . ."

On May 28, 1961 he received a letter from the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince, informing him that "questions had arisen" about his status as a Haitian resident and "would he please drop in for a discussion of the matter as soon as possible." He went the next day, was ushered into a small back office occupied by a sallow, prematurely bald American wearing rimless glasses and a fixed smile. Without comment, the man—who introduced himself as Roger Glasscock—took out a dossier and began reading aloud a history of Bellows' gun running activities.

"What in the hell is this?" Bellows interrupted angrily. "You people planning to have me deported?"

Glasscock shook his head. "Quite to the contrary. I want you to go to work for us."

"Who is us?" Bellows barked, already guessing the answer.

"The CIA, of course." Glasscock went on to declare that the U.S. was expecting a huge step-up of Communist activity in Venezuela. Because of that nation's vast oil resources, it was Communism's top target in the Western Hemisphere. "We have reason to believe that your outfit is supplying most of the arms used by the Castroite guerrillas there. Information about the size of future shipments—and to whom they're delivered—will be invaluable to us."

Bellows shook his head. "Too risky. Sorry."

"Are you afraid of the Reds?"

"Hell, no! But Oliver Bontemps scares me silly. If he ever found out I was mixing politics with business, he'd have me peeled with a dull knife. Besides, he's done a lot for me. I couldn't betray him."

"I'm not asking you to," Glasscock said. "We're not interested in Bontemps, just a few of his clients. Suppose I give you my word that we won't intercept any of the shipments—at least while they're still in the custody of Bontemps' employees? Will that help ease your conscience? In Korea, as a POW, you preferred torture and near-starvation to cooperating with the Communists. I can't see you helping them now . . ."

They talked for nearly an hour. "He pulled out all the stops," Bellows was to recall several years later. "Waved the flag, went over my war record, even offered me \$1500 a month for my services. In the end, I gave in. Besides the money, I guess I'd become pretty sick of the business I was in . . ."

**F**OR the next month, Bellows passed on everything he could learn about Venezuelan arm shipments. Although the outflow of weapons was accomplished in batches capable of being transported by small, fast boats, the total was frighteningly impressive: more than 200 heavy machine guns, 80,000 rounds of 50 caliber ammunition, 500 submachine guns and semi-automatic carbines. Whoever was receiving the stuff was obviously planning more than a skirmish.

Then, on July 2, Bellows was informed by Bontemps that he was to ferry a load to Lake Maracaibo, Venezuela's main oil production area. As soon as he received his orders, he met with Roger Glasscock in a hotel room.

"This is the break we've been waiting for," the agent said excitedly. "What I'm really after are the names of the Venezuelan group's leaders, where their headquarters is located . . . Is there some way you could manage to stay on with the guerrillas after you drop off the arms?"

"Good God, no!" Bellows snorted. "I'll be in and out in less than ten minutes. Guys like that don't appreciate loiterers."

Glasscock smiled. "Sorry. Just talking through my hat. Wouldn't expose you to such danger anyway. We're not completely callous, you know."



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Even at the time, Bellows was faintly suspicious about Glasscock's casualness in accepting his refusal. However, his doubts weren't confirmed until, on the night of July 6, a Venezuelan patrol boat blew the *Felicite* to pieces, stranding him with the guerrilla band that had unloaded the guns.

AS soon as the pint-sized guerrilla leader was sure that the patrol boat wasn't going to return, he gave the order to move on. Without being told, Bellows joined the column of men and burros. Sure that he had been double crossed by Glasscock, his mind seethed with anger. Since the CIA man knew the spot where Bellows was to deliver the guns, it would have been easy for him to arrange the *Felicite's* destruction—and, more important—make it look as though the patrol boat had merely chanced across them. Like it or not, Bellows was now the CIA's "inside man" with the Venezuelan Reds. He wasn't too worried about being shot—not at the moment, anyway. Oliver Bontemps' reputation was better protection than a bullet-proof vest, since anyone who harmed a Bontemps' employee was automatically scratched off the firm's list of acceptable clients.

By dawn the column was out of the belt of coastal jungle and wending its way over a mountain pass west of Lake Maracaibo. The view of the giant lake was astonishing. Thousands of off shore oil derricks poked up out of the brownish water and countless more wells dotted the land itself as far as the eye could see. Directly east lay the Lagunillas field, a forest of derricks extending all the way to the towering Northern Andes. Even though it was barely light, trucks and cars—toylike at this distance—were moving along the roads criss-crossing the fields.

The stoop-shouldered *jefe*—who had finally relaxed enough to introduce himself as Julio—grimaced. "All that oil going to run Imperialist Cadillacs instead of Socialist threshing machines! Disgusting, no?"

Bellows didn't answer. The further he kept away from politics, maintaining his front as a mercenary, the safer he would be in the days to come. "How soon can you get me back to Haiti?" he asked at last.

Julio shrugged and scratched his wispy beard. "That is not for me to say, *senor*. Steps will be taken."

For the next 24 hours, except for brief rest periods, the munitions-loaded caravan moved southwest toward the Colombian border. For Bellows, unused to such physical exertion, the journey became a blurred, one-foot-after-the-other ordeal through stretches of tropical jungle interspersed with brown, mountainous ridges. The trek ended in a Motilone village, atop a heavily wooded hill. The Motilones were an Indian tribe that had fought the incursions of the oil industry for decades. Bellows had heard rumors that many of them had been enlisted in the Communist cause, after being falsely assured that the Reds' purpose was to drive the hated oil men out of the country and tear down the derricks. They were obviously quite used to the guerrillas, since few of the nearly naked, brown skinned natives even bothered to look up when the burro train moved in.

The village was dominated by its great central house, a 50-foot-long, 40-foot-high structure with a straw roof. Waiting for them by the front door of the huge building was a tall young woman clad in the standard *Fidelista* fatigues and cap. Despite his near-exhaustion, the sight of her briefly paralyzed his breath. The masculine clothing heightened, rather than diminished, her beauty. The top two buttons of her green blouse were open, revealing the shadowed cleft between swelling perfectly formed breasts and the too-tight pants emphasized the full-fleshed perfection of her hips and rounded thighs. Her long, blonde hair framed surprisingly fine features considering her statuesque build. Only the anger flaring in her blue eyes detracted from her loveliness.

"Who is this?" she asked Julio, pointing at Bellows.

"The *Yanqui* who delivered the guns," Julio stammered, going on to tell what had happened at the inlet. "I had to bring him with me, *Senorita* Elsa."

"No names," she snapped, "the less he knows the better."

"Now wait a minute," Bellows cut in. "I didn't ask to be here, damn it! I don't see anything worth fighting over."

The argument was ended by a single shouted phrase: "Calle-te! Shut up!"

It was uttered by a burly man who had stepped out of a small hut near the entrance to the common house. Naked to the waist, he was scratching the hairy expanse of paunch that hung over his low slung pants. Like Julio and most of the other guerrillas, he wore a beard but one that completely outdid its rivals. Coal black, curly and knotted, it made him resemble a Neanderthal *Santa Claus*.

His eyes looked like extensions of the massive brows above them and his great hooked nose would have humbled a vulture. Incongruously, an American filter tip cigarette dangled from his heavy lips. Turning his formidable gaze on Bellows, he said: "I have no fear of uttering my name. It is Felix Ordonez. Elsa does not understand that guns are more important than political slogans. Now come have a drink!"

Felix Ordonez, Bellows thought as an enthusiastic, rump-roast-sized palm crashed down on his back in a friendly slap. Like everyone else familiar with the Cuban revolution he recognized the name. Next to Che Guevara himself, Ordonez was the chief military strategist of the Castro movement, a master of guerrilla warfare. He had acted as chief judge at many of the "war crime" trials that had followed Castro's victory, pronouncing the death sentence on hundreds of Batista officials. Born in Peru, holder of a doctorate in law from the University of Lima, he had been a power in Latin American Communism for nearly 20 years. His very presence in Venezuela was proof that a major uprising against the legal government was forthcoming.

Bellows was dragged almost bodily into Ordonez' hut, pushed on to a reed matted-reed chair. The bearded giant shoved a bottle of cane rum at him and roared: "Your *patrone* Bontemps, he is a great man. He will not make consignments on credit but he is a great man nonetheless." He held up the half-inch butt of his filter cigarette. "Next time you come you should bring along a carton of these—the mentholated kind. Very hard to get in the jungle."

FOR the next three hours, Bellows was treated like the guest of honor at a political banquet. Food was brought by the half-dozen plump, white-teethed little Cuban girls who lived with the guerrillas. Dressed in the inevitable war surplus fatigues, they were called "support troops"—a fancy term for camp followers—by the *Fidelistas*. Ordonez, grinning wolfishly, refilled the American's glass with rum again and again. Elsa, the tall blonde, was a silent bystander at the festivities, levelling a suspicious, perpetual stare on Bellows' face. From her looks and name he guessed that she must be descended from one of the German immigrant families that had flocked to Venezuela in the late 19th Century.

Bellows realized that Felix Ordonez was deliberately trying to get him drunk but he was too tired to care. An occasional glance through the open doorway of the hut told him that there was considerable activity in the village clearing. The weapons he had smuggled from Haiti had been heaped under a palm shedroof. Every half hour or so a party of a dozen or more men broke out of the brush and hefted gun and ammo cases, returning the way they had come. The newcomers were dressed in civilian clothes, either peon garments or the khaki pants and cotton plaid shirts of oil field workers. Even half plastered, Bellows was able to figure out what was going on. These were the *Fidelistas* vaunted "night soldiers"—seemingly respectable farmers and laborers by day; after dark, homicidal terrorists. Ordonez' group served as the hard core of the movement, the nucleus around which the others formed for major missions. The guns Bellows had brought would now be moved on to dozens of arsenals scattered throughout the countryside.

Darkness had fallen by the time Bellows, his head swimming, was permitted to leave Ordonez' hut. The pile of weapons had completely disappeared; he noticed dim-

"KEEP DOWN," the guerrilla leader told Bellows, "A gun runner with his head full of holes is no good to us . . ."



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# MOST WANTED MAN

ly. Ordonez had permitted him to select a companion for the night from among the bands' women. He had chosen a sturdy-thighed, full bosomed girl named Concha. She supported him on his lurching walk across the village clearing.

"Quite a place you have here," he groaned as she eased him on to a cot—still bearing a U.S. Army stencil—in the hut in which he had been quartered. A sigh of gratitude escaped from his lips when Concha removed his boots. He fell back on the cot, looked up at her with slightly glazed eyes. She calmly unbuttoned her blouse, pulled her fatigue pants down over her wide hips with an enticing wriggle. Her naked breasts were soft, phosphorescent globes in the moonlight streaming through the hut's single window.

"You don't have to go through with this if you don't want to," Bellows murmured drowsily. "Not sure I'm up to it anyway."

Concha smiled and knelt by the cot, removed his sweat stained denims with graceful, experienced fingers. Then she kissed the hollow of his neck, pushing her tongue between the stiff tendons, moved her moist, sliding mouth to his chest, heavy lips nibbling lightly at his flesh. "I'm up to it," Bellows said and pulled her on to the cot, shivering as he felt the weight of her swelling, olive-skinned belly.

"What did you do before you enlisted?" he asked when their lovemaking had ended and she lay with her dark head cradled on his shoulder.

"Guess."

"I don't have to. I put in a couple of weeks in Havana before the revolution. I'm glad some things haven't changed . . ."

**E**VEN before he was fully awake the next morning, Walt Bellows knew he was in trouble. The first shock came when he realized Concha's warm body no longer lay curled against him. He sat on the edge of the cot, dazedly rubbed his bloodshot eyes. His mouth tasted as though someone had crammed it full of dusty desk blot- ters and a pincushion of pain was slowly revolving inside his skull. With an effort that wrenched a cry of agony from his caked mouth, he arose and pulled on his clothes, weaved to the door.

Except for a handful of Motilones, the compound was empty. A six foot tall, breech-clouted Indian, using a stone knife to form one of the hardwood arrowheads the tribe used to kill game, sat in the gray dust near the hut doorway. He gave Bellows a noncommittal glance as the American hurried past him. A string of nude children formed a line behind the American as he went from hut to hut, looking for Felix Ordonez and his followers. There was no sign that the *Fidelistas* had ever been there at all. Then, in the fourteenth hut he tried, he discovered Julio and five of the raiders eating a breakfast of *frijoles* and dried corn cakes.

"What happened to the others?" Bellows asked.

Julio twitched his bent, narrow shoulders and crammed a cake into his mouth, bit down on it with his rotting teeth. "It is not wise to remain in one place too long. Me and my friends were left behind to care for you. Comrade Ordonez said that you would understand . . ."

"Sure. What's in the works, anyway?"

"Comrade Ordonez said that another shipment of guns from Senor Bontemps will come in three days. You will go with us to pick it up and return aboard the boat. Simple, no?"

Bellows, despite the wave of fear surging through him, managed a casual nod. He knew that Julio was lying. Oliver Bontemps would never send a load of armaments so soon after the loss of one of his vessels, especially with Bellows' fate unknown. He hurried back to his own hut, saw that his .45 automatic and holster were still draped over the foot of the cot. With shaking fingers he checked the weapon, saw with relief that it held a full clip of cartridges. If they were planning some kind of a trick, they never would have left him a weapon, he told himself.

Then he noticed a tiny line of scratches on one of the bullets clustered in his palm. He took out his pen knife, pried the already loose cartridge case away from the slug and saw that all of the powder had been removed. He had been left with a clipful of duds!

Chilling beads of sweat erupting on his forehead, Bellows sank down on the cot, rested his face on his hands. "Got to know what he's cooked up for me?" Only one possibility

made sense. Julio was going to kill him but in such a way that the guerrillas would seem blameless, thus averting a break in their vital business alliance with Oliver Bontemps. I should have guessed last night that I'd had it," he thought. A big wheel like Ordonez never would have given me his real name if he thought I'd live to repeat it. . . But how in the hell are they planning to murder me?

He soon had the answer. Later in the morning, Julio visited him. "Tonight we go on a raid," he announced. "It is a rule of Comrade Ordonez. Whenever we use an Indian village, we do them a favor in return. About 15 miles from here is an oil company camp that has intruded on the tribe's hunting grounds. Very small—an exploration group. We promised the chief that we would help burn them out. You will go with us."

"No thanks," Bellows yawned. "My job is selling and delivering guns, not firing them. None of my business."

The oily smile left Julio's skinny face. "I must insist, senior. It is for your own protection. The Motilones hate Americans. The chiefs of the oil crews are Americans. If I left you here alone, one of them might kill you just because your skin is too light. How would I explain such a misfortune to Comrade Ordonez? You will not have to take part in the raid, just stay out of the way. . ."

Since too vehement an opposition would make Julio realize that he was wise to the plot against him, Bellows finally agreed.

"It is best this way," Julio said as he left the hut.

Now the last piece was in place. Bellows knew that petroleum exploration parties venturing into this part of Venezuela were heavily armed and ready for any eventuality. During the guerrillas' "attack," the American would be deliberately placed in the oil camp's line of fire. He could imagine the type of message Ordonez would send to Oliver Bontemps: "It was a most regrettable accident. Your agent Bellows—whom I grew to like immensely during his short time among us—met with death at the hands of the trigger-happy Imperialists. I have already disciplined the officer who, without my knowledge, permitted Senor Bellows to accompany him on such a dangerous mission . . ."

For the rest of the day Bellows desperately tried to figure a way out of his dilemma. Simply making a run for it would be senseless. They'd nail him ten minutes after he left the village. Then, suddenly, it was too late. A greasgun cradled in his right arm, Julio reappeared in the hut doorway. "We leave in five minutes."

Bellows nodded and strapped on his useless .45. He still had one slight advantage over the guerrillas—they weren't aware that he had detected the doctored bullets. But it wasn't the kind of edge that inspired a rash of confidence.

**D**ARKNESS had fallen by the time the party—Bellows, the six guerrillas and about a dozen Indians—had descended the steep hillside below the village and were swallowed up by the thick pocket of jungle below. It was like entering a coalbin blindfolded but somehow the silent Motilones swiftly found their way along trails little wider than a city sidewalk. Bellows' spot was about midway in the straggling column, sandwiched between Julio and a stocky, scar-faced guerrilla named Pepe. He had contrived to fall in behind the man when he noticed that he wore a .45 pistol on his hip. The sight of the bullets looped on the bandolier-style gunbelt was as tantalizing as a bottle of 150 proof rum to a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Somehow he had to get some of those cartridges.

His chance came when they were walking down a rough, gravelly incline. Pretending to lose his footing, Bellows stumbled forward and crashed into Pepe. They fell to the ground in a heap, the guerrilla cursing angrily. "Sorry," Bellows murmured as he helped the other man to his feet. A .45 cartridge, skillfully slipped out of Pepe's belt, was clutched in Bellows' sweating fist when they began moving again. One lousy bullet, he thought, but better than nothing . . .

It was nearly midnight before they reached the area where the oil exploration camp had been erected. Julio held a quick final briefing. The layout was simple—three prefab buildings surrounded by a barbed wire fence. There were only about 10 men inside, Julio said—three American geologists and a gang of Venezuelan laborers. Since such camps had often been attacked by Indians in the past, at least two or three guards would be posted. "But they will only be expecting arrows or maybe old muskets," Julio chuckled. "With our automatic weapons, we can cut the place to pieces from hiding. . . Senor Bellows, you will stay with me. I am responsible for you. . ."

As they moved toward the entrance of the camp, the pretense of checking his automatic, he had already inserted his single, precious live shell into the firing chamber.



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moved off to bracket the geologists' compound, less than a quarter of a mile away. Only one man—a squat-faced Motilone—accompanied Bellows and the little guerrilla sub-chief. Suddenly the Indian, who was leading the way, grunted something in guttural dialect and pointed down. Half hidden under loose brush was a length of wire, stretched taut about six inches off the ground. It ran to the trunk of a tree. "Tripwire," Julio explained with a black-toothed grin. "It's a trick the oilmen use to frighten off Motilone raiders. Touch it and a bundle of dynamite goes off high in the tree. Until we taught them differently the foolish Indians actually believed the noise was made by an angry god. Keep your eyes open for more of them."

A few minutes later they were close enough to the camp to see a light shining in one of the shack windows. They crawled the rest of the way on their bellies, took shelter in a heavy corpse of trees just short of the 50 foot band of cleared ground in front of a high barbed wire fence. Bellows could see the vague outline of a guard pacing back and forth inside the wire.

Julio glanced at his watch. The attack was due to start at 12:25, only seconds away. "What do you want me to do?" Bellows whispered.

"Just keep down," Julio muttered. Then the guerrilla uttered a savage yelping signal and a hail of automatic fire erupted out of the bush. The guard screamed and crumpled to the ground; an instant later, floodlights mounted on poles around the compound perimeter flickered to life, sending a searing-white tidal wave of illumination into the trees where the guerrillas were hiding. Bellows saw muzzle flashes from the shack windows as

## TRUE BOOKLENGTH ADVENTURE

CPYRGHT

the oilmen began returning shots. He pulled his .45, drew back the weapon's hammer, waiting for Julio to make his move.

It wasn't long in coming. "Now, *senor*," the guerrilla said calmly, "I want you to stand up and run toward the camp."

"What in hell is this?" Bellows gasped, putting exactly the right note of incredulity into his voice.

"An execution, I'm afraid," Julio sighed.

"You forget I have a gun too," he growled, raising his .45 level with the grinning little terrorist's face.

"So you have," Julio said with a harsh laugh. In a malicious parody of good will, he lowered the barrel of his grease-gun a few inches. "You may have the first shot. Just like in your Yankee cowboy pictures."

He was still laughing when Bellows' only live bullet blew off most of his forehead.

The Motilone guide, who had taken cover about five feet away, jumped up, swerved his primitive palmwood bow toward the American. Snatching Julio's greasegun, Bellows got off a burst that drove the Indian on a ghastly, stumbling charge into the floodlit clearing. A dozen more slugs, fired from the camp shacks, plowed into his twitching body before he fell.

There, Bellows thought triumphantly as he crawled further back into the jungle, *are two of the most surprised corpses in Venezuela.*

When he was sure that he was out of sight of the camp, he lurched to his feet and broke into a frenzied run. He had only one plan at this point—to put as much space as possible between himself and the guerrillas before daybreak. He had covered less than 2000 feet when something snagged his left ankle, and he sprawled on his face. The greasegun flew from his hands.

Those goddam tripwires, his brain screamed in the split second before the TNT charge in the branches over his head exploded with an ear-rending roar; his body seemed to be driven into the earth, as if crushed beneath a giant rubber heel . . .

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The muzzle of the carbine only inches from his face. Although the blast still rang in his stunned ears, he realized it must be an illusion, since it was now daylight. His first fully aware thought was a frantic: *My God, do I still have my arms and legs?*

Apparently divining the cause of the terror-stricken expression on his captive's face, the man holding the gun grunted in English, "Don't worry—you're all in one piece. We put the charges too high up to kill anybody. You got clipped by a falling branch, that's all. Personally, I'm glad you'll make the firing squad. Getting blown up quick is too good for your kind."

The speaker—a tall, gangling, gray-haired man in stained fatigues—was obviously an American. Bellows, with effort, pushed himself to a sitting position, realized he had been lying on the floor of one of the tin-roofed compound shacks. There was a small square of bandage on the back of his head.

"We found you early this morning," the tall man said. "Your buddies didn't hang around to pick you up. If it's of any interest to you, we killed two of them before they ran off. We went through your papers, Bellows. Never thought I'd live to see a Yank fighting with those pigs."

"You mean I killed two of them," Bellows grunted. "I was a prisoner, not part of the raiding party."

"Tell it to the army," the geologist said contemptuously. "They'll be picking you up soon. We radioed them hours ago."

The words were barely out of the man's mouth when they both heard the pounding flutter of helicopter blades. The geologist waved the barrel of his weapon in the direction of the shack door. "Let's go."

The other members of the oil exploration party were clustered in the compound when the geologist pushed Bellows outside. The oilmen—Americans and Venezuelans alike—stared at him with silent hatred while they waited for the army helicopter to touch down. "Damn it, I'm innocent!" he wanted to shout but he knew it wouldn't do any good.

THE first man out of the chopper was Roger Glasscock, the CIA man whose trickery had propelled Bellows into the middle of Felix Ordonez' guerrilla organization. On his sallow face was a lopsided, vaguely apologetic—and utterly guilty—grin.

Somehow Bellows managed to hold on to his temper until he and the agent were alone in one of the compound buildings. Then an explosive cry of rage was torn from his lips: "You treacherous, foul-mothered son of a bitch! You deliberately had me marooned in this hellhole! Admit it, goddam you!"

"Ridiculous," Glasscock scoffed. "Your experience has disrupted your judgment, Walt. I wouldn't do such a thing. You'll never realize how happy I was when I got word that you'd turned up here. I moved over to the Venezuelan Army's district headquarters in Maracaibo as soon as I heard about your boat getting shot up. Thought you'd reappear eventually . . . What did you learn while you were with the Reds? Might as well take advantage of what's happened, unfortunate though it was."

Bellows could barely bring himself to tell the agent what had happened to him. But finally, suppressing his spite, he decided that nailing Ordonez' band was more important than a personal grudge.

"But why did they want to kill you?" Glasscock said in a baffled tone when the story was done. "It doesn't make any sense. From your description of the setup at the Motilone village, it couldn't have been Ordonez' central camp—just a prearranged spot for an arms distribution. It'll probably never be used again so its location being known to an outsider is of little importance. Especially measured up against a break with Oliver Bontemps."

"The way I figure it Ordonez didn't want the news of his being here to get out," Bellows said.

"Nonsense," Glasscock scoffed. "We've been pretty certain for months now that he's been heading the local Commie operation. Besides, he didn't have to volunteer his name after you hit the village . . . No, there was some other reason why murdering you became inevitable . . . What about this blonde girl—the one they called Elsa? Could she have been so important that your accidentally seeing her could have compromised the organization?"

Bellows shrugged. "As far as I could tell she was just another 'support troop'—a little more attractive than the rest and more overbearing. She didn't even look as if she'd been with them very long. Her fatigues were new and she had a kind of softer look—physically anyway—than the other women."

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Continued



# MOST WANTED MAN

"I'll start a check on her. Not that many blondes—especially with German first names—kicking around this part of the world. The Venezuelan security guys might turn up something . . ."

"Good luck," Bellows said and stood up. "All I care about is getting home to Haiti."

"In time," Glasscock murmured evasively. "First we'll head to Maracaibo. I'll want a detailed stenographic statement from you. We won't start back until after dark. Don't want any Reds to spot us bringing you in."

It was nearly 10 p.m. when the helicopter landed at Maracaibo, the largest city in the oil producing region. Bellows was whisked in a closed car from the airport to an isolated villa outside town. The place turned out to be the private residence of Colonel Adolpho Guitterez, vice commander of the army group in charge of combatting the Fidelista terrorists. He was given a room in the back of the house and two guards were assigned to watch the door. Too tired to wonder about these unusual precautions, he was asleep 30 seconds.

The next day Bellows began to realize that, as far as Glasscock was concerned, his work was not yet done. For one thing, he wasn't allowed to leave his room. This in itself didn't bother him particularly, since he figured it was just overzealousness in protecting him. Then he asked the guards to bring him a razor and a change of clothing. He hadn't shaved for more than three days and his denim pants and workshirt were begrimed and reekingly foul. Both requests were, inexplicably, refused. He angrily asked to see Glasscock or Guitterez but was informed that neither was in the villa.

Four more days of this strange confinement passed before Glasscock re-appeared. The man entered the room without knocking, stepped back with a sour wince. "Excellent," he said approvingly. "You really stink to heaven."

"And itch too," snarled Bellows, who now resembled someone who had been cast away on a desert island. "What in the hell are you up to, anyway? Why haven't I been allowed to even take a bath?"

GLASSCOCK waved the questions aside and dumped a thick sheaf of cards on the bed. "Venezuelan Intelligence has been working day and night trying to track down that tall blonde of yours. On the chance that she has some connection with the oil companies, I've rounded up these."

The pasteboards were security records, including photos, the type compiled on anyone permitted to live or work in the dozens of oil company towns along the lake. The women in the pictures had only three things in common: good looks, light hair and the first name "Elsa."

The face of the tall, striking blonde he had met in the Motilone village turned up on the 32nd card: "Elsa Cardenas; age 27; occupation cafe owner; residence, Jaxco."

Excited, Glasscock dashed out of the room. He returned in two hours, announcing that a series of phone calls had turned up more data on the woman. "You were right," he said. "She's the granddaughter of German immigrants. Owns bars and fancy brothels in a dozen lake towns. Pretty well off financially and has plenty of friends among the top oil people and government officials. That's why Ordonez wanted to get rid of you, Walt. You'd accidentally stumbled on one of his chief sources of intelligence, the kind of information no guerrilla outfit can exist without. A woman with her connections is worth more to him than a dozen gun runners."

"If you're right and she's a spy, what the hell was she doing up in the hills the other day?"

"That's what I want you to help find out," Glasscock said. "Among other things, I've kept you looking like a pushrat just in case we learned who she was. Tomorrow you're going to turn up at her home in Jaxco and ask for help in getting out of the country. Your story will be that you got separated from the others during the raid on the exploration camp and have been hiding out ever since . . ."

"You're absolutely nuts!" Bellows cut in. "Why would I run to the Reds when they tried to blow my head off?" "You would if you weren't aware of the plot against you, if you said this guy Julio and the Indian you killed were knocked off by gun fire from the compound. Who's going to prove differently? There aren't any live witnesses to what really happened and I've already suppressed the news that you were picked up after the raid."

The flabbergasted Bellows paced about the room like an angered cat. He'd rather walk through a wading pool full of alligators than get involved with those guys again.

"I'm not asking you to. The Cardenas woman lives alone except for a maid. And Colonel Guitterez will post secret police all over Jaxco. She'll send word to Ordonez that you've turned up, of course, but you might have days alone with her before they can do anything about trying to get rid of you. Chances are we'd never get anything out of the bitch if we arrested her but you might do better."

The CIA man paused a moment, his eyes worried. "I told you once before that we were expecting a major Red move here, the kind of explosion that can paralyze an entire country with fear. The way I figure it, that explosion may be only days away. The guerrillas have been almost inactive for more than a week. That usually means a buildup for a big push. The odds are that your stay with Elsa Cardenas will produce no hard information about their plans but I have to try every angle."

"No dice," Bellows said, shaking his head. "I want out."

"There's something you don't seem to understand, Walt," Glasscock said slowly. "You're under arrest, charged with gun running and taking part in a Communist attack in which a Venezuelan civilian was killed. If you don't cooperate with me, I can have you shot."

"But I came here on your orders," Bellows protested.

"That doesn't make any difference. I want Felix Ordonez too badly to worry about excessive scruples."

Bellows realized that the CIA agent meant everything he said. "All right," he growled in defeat. "I'll be your pigeon again—but God help you, Glasscock, if I ever find you when all this is over."

"Fair enough," Glasscock said, a victorious little smirk on his colorless lips . . .

JAXCO, located about 120 miles south of the district capital, was like any of a hundred company towns around Lake Maracaibo. The place, although it had been established 15 years ago, had a slapped-together look; more than 80 percent of the buildings were still the tin-roofed shacks common to month-old boom towns. Standing out among them like diamonds in a junk heap were a handful of more permanent structures, the homes of petroleum company officials and higher rank technicians. In one of these, surrounded by a high wall, lived Elsa Cardenas.

It was 3:15 a.m. on July 13—little more than a week after the destruction of Walt Bellows' boat—but the American felt as though he had spent his whole life crawling over the sun-baked Venezuelan landscape. Climbing the rear wall of Elsa's property was easy—fortunately, it wasn't covered with broken glass in the local tradition—but as soon as he reached the other side, he yanked a three-foot long machete from his belt. "She keeps a police dog on the grounds," Glasscock had told him, "but I understand it's a fat, pampered old animal that wouldn't wake up if you set off a firecracker in its ear."

About 200 feet of dense garden separated the wall from the sprawling house. Bellows had covered less than five yards when the dog jumped him, leaping out of the shadow of a jacaranda tree like a sleek-muscled gray rocket. Before he could raise the machete, slaving fangs grazed his upper left arm, got a grip on his sleeve. The dog's eyes were like blazing quoits in the darkness; its growls, the voice of the devil itself. Panicking, he wildly swung the pinioned arm, felt the cloth of his shirt tear loose. The animal fell on its back, was back on its feet in an instant, leaped again.

Bellows' machete blade caught the furry, hurtling form in midair, sinking up to the hilt in its underbelly. Its weight carried both man and beast to the ground. Sobbing with fury, Bellows jumped erect, hacked at the dog's corpse until the machete became too heavy to raise again. Behind him, the ground floor lights of the house came on. He whirled, saw a human figure standing on the back terrace. Overcome with an anger that turned his vision into a scarlet, stinging blur, he lurched toward the terrace, the bloodstained machete upheld threateningly. "Is that you, Elsa?" he yelled. "God damn you, it better be!"

The blonde girl, dressed in a filmy silk robe that clung to her full-curved body like damp gauze, backed away when he rushed up the terrace steps. Her blue eyes widened in disbelief.

"Walt Bellows," he snarled. "Remember me?"

"Get in. Quickly," she gasped, motioning toward the open French window at her back. Beyond it lay a bedroom. Bellows stalked inside, turned to face her. For a full minute they stared at each other in quivering uncertainty. Then Bellows, his killing rage dissipated, lowered the machete.

"Give me a minute," Elsa said. "My maid must have heard the uproar too. She might call the police . . ."

Before Bellows could stop her, Elsa was out of the room.

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the edge of her rumpled, silk-sheeted bed, the machete hanging limply between his knees. "What are you doing here?" she asked. Her delicate features had regained the arrogance he had noticed at their first meeting.

"I had no place else to go."

"But how did you find me?"

"Julio told me all about you," he said, "the afternoon before he got killed."

"The fool," she cried.

Bellows repeated the lies he had rehearsed with Roger Glasscock, told how Julio had been cut down by a lucky shot from the exploration camp compound seconds after the attack had begun. "I've been wandering around ever since," he concluded. "All I had to go on was your name and the fact that you lived in Jaxco. Wasn't easy to get here following back roads, dodging army patrols . . ."

"You'll have to leave," she said firmly.

He stood up. "The hell I do, honey. I'm at the end of my rope. No money, no papers, no friends. Unless you help me, I'm washed up. Throw me out and I'll go straight to the cops. I've got a hunch the truth about your set-up here would earn me a lot of leniency in court . . ."

Her hostility melted as quickly as a popsicle left out in the midsummer sun. Somehow she managed to form a smile. "I was hasty, Mr. Bellows. Of course I'll help you."

"Thought you would," he said sarcastically.

"Tomorrow I'll arrange for a man to lead you to Comrade Ordenez' camp and . . ."

His harsh laughter drowned out her words. "No, thanks. I've gone that road." He took his passport from his hip pocket. "I'll need a government tourist's entry stamp on this, dated about a week ago. With your connections, I'm sure you can arrange a competent forgery. That, clean clothes and enough bolivers to buy passage on a nice, safe boat to any place is all I want from you people. Until you can arrange it, I'm not setting foot outside this house."

To his surprise, she didn't argue with him. He sensed that, for some reason, she was trying to avoid trouble at all costs.

"NOW I'm going to get cleaned up," he said, scratching his week's growth of beard. Before entering the adjoining bathroom, he opened the drawer on the night table beside her bed. As he'd expected, it contained a gun—a flat, black .32 automatic concealed beneath a box of lace handkerchiefs. He stood up, put the weapon in his pocket. "I'll take care of this."

"What happened to your .45?" she asked idly.

"Traded it to a farmer for a bag of food four days ago," he yawned. "Bullets were ruined anyway. I had to cross a stream while I was getting away from the oil camp and took a ducking." He knew what her apparently casual remark meant—that she had been aware of Ordenez' plot to kill him. You're a sweet little tarantula, he thought, appreciatively examining the creamy mounds of her breasts, half-spilling out of the flimsy robes' loose bodice.

"Do you have a razor?"

"I keep one for guests," she said, the ghost of a smile on her full lips. It vanished when he peeled off his shirt. "Do you always undress in front of ladies?"

"Whenever possible," he replied with a grin. "Now let's go into the bathroom. Maybe, when I've had some sleep, I'll trust you completely but right now I don't want you out of sight any longer than I can help it."

She sat on a three-legged stool across the room while he soaked himself in the tub, the indignant expression on her face giving way to reluctant amusement. Her .32 automatic lay on the edge of the tub, only a few inches from his hand. "You're really a mad one, aren't you?" she said in her husky voice, her blue eyes focused on his muscular shoulders. "What would you do if I walked out now? Shoot me?"

"Probably." He ran a washcloth between the toes of his right foot. "Mind passing me a towel?"

He splashed out of the tub, stepped into the large bath towel she raised for him. Water from his dripping body fell on her face and arms. The bodice of her robe now gaped wide, fully exposing the firm, upraised beauty of her left breast. He had already guessed that she belonged to him for the night if he wanted her. He reached out, touched the pink fleshed perfection of her body. Almost involuntarily she moved forward, thrusting herself against his calloused palm. Her tongue flicked over her already damp lower lip.

"I'll need a bed," he muttered. "How about yours?"

"Why not?" A chuckle rose in the ivory column of her throat. "You'll make a nice change after those large-

I've been entertaining for the past year . . ."

He'd planned to shave but, suddenly, this dreamed-of luxury becoming unimportant as he raised Elsa in his arms and carried her to the bed. He tore off her robe, gazed down hungrily at the bared beauty of her white hips and soft thighs. "Hurry up," she murmured and grasped his wrist, pulling him to her with wanton force . . .

In the brief lulls between the three incredibly active bouts of lovemaking that followed, Bellows learned more about Elsa Cardenas' background. She told him that she had been married to a non-Communist revolutionary executed in 1958 by the Perez Jimenez dictatorship. The democratic government that had followed the overthrow of the Jimenez regime had not satisfied her thirst for revenge. "Betancourt means well," she said in a voice tight with remembered fury, "but the wealthy pigs who supported Jimenez are still collecting their dividends, waiting for another chance to seize total power. Only Ordenez is capable of destroying them. He is a great man, Ordenez. Some day he will be the greatest man in all South America. He doesn't command in Venezuela alone, you know. The National Liberation Armies in Colombia and Northern Brazil are also under his orders . . ."

Beneath the fanatical sincerity of her statements, he again sensed an oddly strained note. Although her physical passion was too awesome to have been faked, he knew that the main reason she had given herself to him so readily was to gain his confidence with the most potent tools she possessed. As he had in the Motilone village, Bellows smelled danger—but this time it was a more subtle menace, something he didn't even begin to comprehend—

Just before dawn, despite his nervousness, Bellows fell asleep. When he awoke, it was mid morning. He blinked and sat up, saw Elsa standing in the doorway. She was carrying a large cardboard box, which she deposited on a chair. "Your new clothes," she said. "The visa will take a little longer, I'm afraid, but you should have it soon."

Outside he could hear the unmistakable scrape of a shovel against rocky earth. "What's that?"

"Angelina, my maid, is digging a grave in the garden . . ."

Still not fully awake, he groped for the .32, which he had left under his pillow. It was still there.

"Relax," she said, a mocking smile on her lips. "It's for Pico, the dog you killed. I didn't really like the beast, if it makes any difference to you . . . I'll be gone most of the day. I do have a bar and restaurant business to take care of, you know. Angelina will tend to you. You don't have to worry about her. She's a member of the movement."

He got out of bed, stretched his rangy, naked body. "Mind telling me something?" he asked. "What was a city girl like you doing in Ordenez' camp? Going up in the hills and playing guerrilla can't be part of your work for the Reds. Or is Ordenez your boyfriend?"

Her friendly manner evaporated and her blue eyes grew cold. "Never mind all that. I've come to rather like you, *Senor Bellows*. Don't make me change my mind."

After the events of the previous night, Bellows found it hard to believe that he was on a dangerous mission. Angelina—a fat, morose woman—served him breakfast and he spent the rest of the morning lounging around the

"COME over here," Bellows told her. "It's harvest time"





# MOST WANTED MAN

girl's luxuriously furnished home. Despite Elsa's brief burst of frankness about her past, he was sure that the job Glasscock had given him was doomed to failure. Every leading question he had asked about her current activities had either been ignored or turned aside and he was sure the situation wouldn't change. However, to convince the CIA man he'd made an honest effort, he decided to stick it out for one more night.

Following lunch, he lazed in a hammock strung near the open gardener's shed in behind the house. The air had grown heavy in his nostrils and the sky had turned a dingy gray. A storm was obviously brewing. He'd heard about the mid-summer squalls common on Lake Maracaibo, turning it within minutes into a frothing, wind-lashed deathtrap that could equal the North Atlantic at its worst. Feeling drops of rain on his face, he was about to slide out of the hammock when he saw Elsa—clad in a peasant blouse and skirt—coming up the flagstoned garden walk. A pile of gardeners' tools lay within arm's reach. He picked up a syckle, playfully draped the blade in the loose neckline of her blouse when she bent over him, baring her heavy unfettered, loose-swinging breasts. Then, glimpsing the tense expression on her face, he removed the tool. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"A storm is coming," she said distractedly.

And then she was gone, running back toward the house. He had just swung his legs out of the hammock when she stopped and turned. "Bellows, it will take another 24 hours to have your passport altered! Get out anyway! Go anywhere!"

**G**ALVANIZED by the desperation in her voice, he leaped to his feet and tried to catch her. But he was too late. Angelina, the dumpy maid, had already opened the driveway gate, was sitting in the passenger seat of Elsa's red Triumph sports car. The blonde girl scrambled behind the wheel and gunned the motor; the car roared out into the street with a screech of burning rubber.

Baffled and scared, Bellows darted into the house, and grabbed the kitchen telephone. He knew Roger Glasscock had set himself up in the headquarters of the Jaxco police force. He shouted the station number into the phone twice before he realized the line was dead. Already the full force of the lake storm had hit, turning the sky over Jaxco into a wet inky sea, a wall of tropic rain that pounded down on the dusty earth at a rate of ten million tiny hammer blows per second.

Then the first explosion came, shaking the tiled floor under Walt Bellow's feet. On the northern horizon a 500-foot-high column of flame seared up through the rain, burned on and on unextinguishably. Seconds later the awesome roar was duplicated as another of the 876 producing oil wells around Jaxco went up—turned into a fiery hell by a dynamite-and-thermite charge. And then it was too late to tip off Glasscock. If he didn't know by now what was happening, it meant he was already dead.

The poor son of a bitch would have given his soul to find out where Ordenez was going to hit next, Bellows thought, an involuntary, bitter laugh hardening his lips and all the time he was sitting right on the spot.

The best description of the now famous July 14, 1961 Communist raid on Jaxco is contained in an article entitled "Death of a Venezuelan Town," published in the April, 1962 issue of *Petroleum Quarterly*, an industry trade magazine. "The attack—undoubtedly the most vicious and well-coordinated mounted by the Fidelista forces in Venezuela—came totally without warning," wrote correspondent Robert L. Hilburn. "For weeks in advance, heavily armed Reds had filtered into pre-planned encampments in the jungle and mountain areas west of the town. But even months earlier, plans for the massacre had been carefully laid. It was later determined that nearly 30 per cent of the native workers employed in the Jaxco oil fields were Communist plants, put there simply to make this cataclysm possible. One diabolical circumstance, more than any other, insured the raiders' success—the perfect timing. A captured directive issued by Felix Ordenez, chief of the Maracaibo Red force, stated: 'The uprising will occur during the first heavy rainstorm after July 10. Comrades in the oil fields, upon the firing of a smoke flare beyond the northern edge of town, will move on their assigned targets...'

"The reasoning behind this flexible but carefully planned strategy was immediately apparent. Because of the vast geographical distance they had to cover, the Venezuelan army

units assigned to protect the Lake Maracaibo oil fields relied upon air lifts—usually in U.S.-provided troop-carrying helicopters—to mount quick retaliatory strikes. In the type of storm known to hit the lake during the summer months, the army would be pinned down for hours. Ordenez' raiders reinforced their advantage by severing telephone lines and striking first at the oil company's radio station... Less than an hour after the first shot was fired, a force of more than 700 guerrillas had slaughtered nearly half the population of Jaxco and set fire to 72 per cent of its buildings. Damage to the oil wells outside the town has not yet been fully calculated but the financial loss is expected to exceed \$12 million."

Caught up in the middle of the attack, Walt Bellows wasn't bothering himself with long range estimates of the destruction, much less worrying about the economic consequences. His only concern was for his own neck. One fact was immediately clear—for the moment, the safest possible place for him was Elsa Cardenas' home. As a key figure in Ordenez' army, her property would be spared the destruction that flared on all sides.

Clutching the .32 he had taken from her the night before, he scrambled up the house's outside staircase to the flat roof. Ignoring the rain and wind, he stared with stunned eyes at the destruction spread before him. Despite the downpour, the main street of Jaxco was already burning like an acetylene torch, flames leaping from rooftop to rooftop. He picked out the red-tiled roof of the police station, seconds before a dynamite blast blew the tiles hundreds of feet into the air. Like packs of wild dogs, knots of guerrillas were running through the narrow streets, waving guns and machetes over their heads, chasing screaming civilians. The now-overwhelming, steady roar of the oil well fires turned the whole spectacle into a ghastly pantomime, smothering the crackle of small arms fire. Directly in front of the house, a woman in a billowing Indian dress—probably a harmless domestic servant—fell in a gutter. Three uniformed guerrillas were on her in an instant, machetes swinging. A howl of rage—in audible even to his own ears—was wrenched from Bellows. He aimed his puny automatic at the terrorists, squeezed off shots until the clip was empty. But the killers, their bloody work done, ran off unharmed, not even hearing the shots. Cursing, Bellows collapsed against the stone railing that ran around the roof, tears of frustration and anger coursing down his cheeks...

**I**t was nearly half an hour later when he moved out. The rain had already stopped; the sky toward the east, lightening except for the black, billowing smoke clouds from the blazing wells. Eventually some of the guerrillas would check the house, he told himself. A glance over the balustrade had already revealed that the fighting—what was left of it—had moved out of the neighborhood. His mind numb—but his body still quivering with homicidal anger—Bellows went back down the steps, slid through the front gate into the smoldering ruins of Jaxco. He edged past the decapitated body of the Indian woman, dashed to take temporary cover in the gutted shell of the next house. The entire street was empty of the living. He guessed that most of the victorious Fidelistas had congregated in the center of town, where there might still be a handful of intact stores to be looted before they retreated back into the hills.

He was about to move on when he heard the roar of a car engine and Elsa's red Triumph turned into the street. At the wheel was the burly form of Felix Ordenez. The Communist leader's long, heavy beard was gray with soot, and blood—someone else's—lay across the front of his fatigue jacket. A cigarette, smoked nearly down to the filter, dangled from his cruel, heavy lips. Elsa sat beside him, blonde hair a disarrayed tangle, her delicate face expressionless, mouth slack. Two Fidelistas were sitting on the trunk, like kids returning from a football game. Crouching down further behind a rubble pile, Bellows cursed himself for expanding all his ammo in a senseless gesture...

But it didn't matter. Even before the car was out of sight behind the wall of Elsa's house, Walt Bellows knew that he was going to kill Felix Ordenez, even if it meant adding his own corpse to the massacred hundreds now lying in Jaxco's smoking skeleton...

It took him less than five minutes to find a weapon. Feeling as isolated as if he were on the moon, he skulked through the ruins, silent now except for guns being fired gleefully into the air by celebrating rebels blocks away. A Morris restaurant, once a popular place for a cantina, he bent, scooped up the severed, jagged-edged neck of a rum bottle. He was straightening when a short, fat man in oil

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worker's clothing, a Browning submachine gun over his shoulder, rounded the corner, only a few feet away. The man's jaw dropped and he fumbled at the strap of his gun. Before he could get it free, Bellows pounced, lashing out with the bottle. The razor-sharp glass plunged into the guerrilla's throat, turning his cry of alarm into a whispered gurgle.

The machine gun in his hands, Bellows turned back toward Elsa's house.

He found all three of them in her bedroom—the girl, changing into clean slacks and blouse; the two rebels lounging by the door, taking alternate pulls from a bottle of whiskey; Ordonez, sprawled on the bed, amusing himself turning the overhead fan by firing at the blades with his pistol. The man's black eyes were glazed with half-sane triumph.

It was incredibly easy. Bellows came through the window shooting from the hip. The first burst killed one of the Fidelistas outright, drove the other backwards through the door. He sprawled on his side in the hall, moaning in pain, his right hand still clutching the whiskey bottle. Bellows turned the machine gun, exulting at the terror that transfigured Ordonez's arrogant hawk-like face in the instant before a hail of slugs tore into his broad stomach. He bled in scarlet torrents, like a barrel of wine that had burst its stays.

Screaming, the half-naked Elsa ran past Bellows into the garden. He swivelled the gun toward her but something kept him from squeezing the trigger—probably the warning she had given him before she had fled the house to join Ordonez. He owed her a favor.

Then he was back in the street, running like a madman, sure that he would be cut down at any second by avenging guerrillas. But when, after minutes, there was still no sign of pursuit he conquered his panic and again took cover in the rubble, breathing heavily. He realized that the Fidelistas probably hadn't discovered their leader's death. With all the whooping and shooting going on, they would have paid no attention to a few scattered blasts of machine gun fire. But his margin was slim. By now Elsa must have come out of hiding and found help. Somehow he had to escape from Jaxco before a full scale search for him began.

AFTER darting cautiously into one of the main streets, he stumbled upon the means of escape—a gasoline tank truck parked in the middle of the road. Two guerrillas, laughing crazily, were painting VIVA FELIX on its side, probably planning to drive it through the streets as a symbol of victory over the hated oil company. They died before they even saw the American.

"It's got to work," Bellows muttered, scrambling behind the wheel of the truck, laying his Browning on the seat beside him. He jammed a fatigue cap, snatched from one of the bodies, down over his sandy hair, put the truck in gear and stepped on the gas. To reach the lakeside highway—the only route to safety—he would have to pass through the very center of town, where most of the rampaging rebels were concentrated.

He almost made it. The victory-mad guerrillas milling around Jaxco's tree-lined central square cheered when he drove through them, applauding the gaudy slogan. Bellows laughed and waved back, his eyes staring straight ahead through the windshield. Another three blocks and he'd be out of town with miles of straightaway in front of him. Sweat trickled down from the band of the fatigue cap, stung his eyes. His hands shook on the broad wheel.

He had only one block to go when one of the celebrants leaped on to the truck's running board with a fraternal howl. It turned to a yell of alarm when he caught a close-up glimpse of the driver's unmistakably American features. Bellows drove his fist into the man's face, knocking him into the dust. He pushed the gas pedal all the way to the floor and the huge vehicle shot forward like a steel battering ram. Behind him fusillades of shots rang out, cries of "Alto!" But they soon faded.

Then, with a surge of horror, Bellows felt a blast of heat against his back, glanced over his shoulder and saw that the rear of the truck was on fire, flames licking over the tank in waves. One of the pursuers must have pitched a Molotov cocktail. Even worse, by the way the truck handled, he knew that the tank contained at least a thousand gallons of fuel oil or gasoline. When it heated enough, the works would go up with a bang, scattering parts of his body from one end of Jaxco to the other!

All thoughts of making a run for it along the highway vanished. Ahead lay the brown vastness of Lake Maracaibo. At the end of the connecting road to the highway was a

far enough for deep-hulled tankers to tie up. Bellows guided the wildly swerving truck right onto the dock, crashing through a wooden barrier. A work party of guerrillas, probably planting TNT charges, scattered like a covey of birds when they saw the blazing vehicle rumbling toward them, threw themselves into the water.

Bellows kept driving until the seat at his back started smoking. Then, slamming on the brakes, he leaped out of the cab, ran toward the end of the pier. He went over the railing headfirst, fell 20 feet into the muddy water. He was still under when the truck exploded. When he came up, patches of oil were blazing on the surface all around him. He spotted a clear strip of water, frantically swam through it; his goal, a cargo barge anchored about 500 feet away.

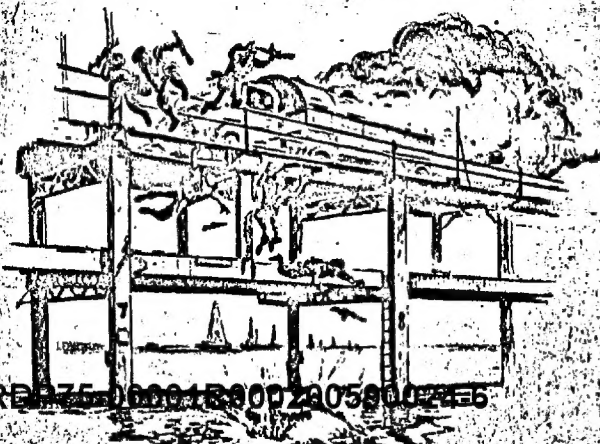
He was halfway there when he heard the sound of an airplane engine. He treaded water for a moment, stared up into the sky, saw an American-made jet trainer with Venezuelan markings zooming low over the beach, its wing guns strafing the Fidelistas. To the west, a dozen troop-carrying helicopters were still black dots against the sky. The relief of Jaxco had begun.

"SOMEHOW I made it to the barge," Bellows told the author of *Red Earth of Cuba* two years later. "But the last 100 feet was like swimming through Jello. I was so tired. After that it was just a matter of waiting to be picked up. By the time the Venezuelan soldiers landed, the Reds had already left, of course. I can't say whether what happened was either a victory or a defeat. They pulled off a raid that accomplished incredible damage and threw terror into every community on the lake for months. On the other hand, I got Ordonez, the biggest man in the movement. His death was a blow to the South American Reds that it took them years to recover from. . . . After I was brought ashore, I had one more unpleasant moment—identifying Roger Glasscock's body. He had been killed with a bayonet. I can't say I liked the bastard but, still, it made me sick to see him like that. I'd already figured he was dead, after the police station was blown up. Turned out, though, that the Reds had caught him in a brothel. . . ."

At his own request, Walt Bellows was permitted to join the army group that went after Felix Ordonez' fleeing followers. The campaign was partially successful, even though the Red force had predictably broken up into a dozen smaller units as soon as it reached the mountains. On August 23, 1961, a band of 226 Communists were overtaken in the valley of the Rio De Oro, a densely jungled area near the Colombian border. In the battle that followed, nine tenths of the guerrillas were killed. Despite himself, Bellows was relieved to discover that Elsa Cardenas wasn't among the dead, even though he was sure the woman had been instrumental in setting up the Jaxco massacre.

Today Walter Bellows operates a travel agency in Detroit, the city of his birth. He never returned to Haiti. "I can picture it now," he wryly told Jasper Ludden. "As soon as I got off the boat at Port-au-Prince, a welcoming committee of Oliver Bontemps' goons would have hustled me up to the old devil's house. He'd be waiting for me in that homey office of his, a sadly paternal look on his face. 'Walter,' he'd have said chidingly. 'I've been reading the papers and it says here that you've gotten yourself involved in politics. You know I can't tolerate such depraved behavior among my employees.' And then he'd have had me taken out and shot. . . ."

"IT'S a present," Bellows yelled from the cab of flaming truck. "One thousand gallons of hot gasoline for Fidel. . . ."



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